

Secretary-General's remarks to the press - on the Middle East

07 May 2024

We are at a decisive moment for the Palestinian and Israeli people and for the fate of the entire region.

An agreement between the Government of Israel and the leadership of Hamas is essential to stop the unbearable suffering of Palestinians in Gaza and of the hostages and their families.

It would be tragic if weeks of intense diplomatic activity for peace in Gaza, yield no ceasefire. No release of hostages. And a devastating offensive in Rafah.

I reiterate my appeal for both parties to show the political courage and spare no effort to secure an agreement now.

To stop the bloodshed. To free the hostages. And to help stabilize a region which is still at risk of explosion.

This is a crucial opportunity that the region – and indeed the world – cannot afford to miss.

Yet things are moving in the wrong direction.

I am disturbed and distressed by the renewed military activity in Rafah by the Israeli Defence Forces.

The closure of both the Rafah and Karem Shalom crossings is especially damaging to an already dire humanitarian situation. They must be re-opened immediately. Just to give an example; we risk running out of fuel this evening.

I urge the Government of Israel to stop any escalation, and engage constructively in the ongoing diplomatic talks.

After more than 1,100 Israelis killed in the Hamas terror attacks of 7 October ... after more than 34,000 Palestinians killed in Gaza, haven't we seen enough?

Haven't civilians suffered enough death and destruction?

Make no mistake – a full-scale assault on Rafah would be a human catastrophe.

Countless more civilian casualties. Countless more families forced to flee yet again – with nowhere safe to go.

Because there is no safe place in Gaza.

Meanwhile, the repercussions will be felt far beyond, in the occupied West Bank, and across the region.

Rafah is the epicenter of humanitarian operations in Gaza.

Attacking Rafah will further upend our efforts to support people in dire humanitarian straits as famine looms.

International humanitarian law is unequivocal: civilians must be protected – whether they leave Rafah or stay in the city.

International humanitarian law must be respected by both parties.

I also remind Israel of its obligation to facilitate the safe and unimpeded access of humanitarian aid and staff into and across Gaza.

Even the best friends of Israel are clear:

An assault on Rafah would be a strategic mistake, a political calamity, and a humanitarian nightmare.

I appeal to all those with influence over Israel to do everything in their power to help avert even more tragedy.

The international community has a shared responsibility to promote a humanitarian ceasefire, the unconditional release of all hostages, and a massive surge in life-saving aid.

It is time for the parties to seize the opportunity and secure a deal for the sake of their own people. Thank you.

New York, 7 May 2024